

## Traffic Safety News & Facts For Employers February 18, 2002

- A major UK investigation into employee safety has revealed that the traditional 48-hour working week is a myth for increasingly stressed-out company car drivers. Data collected from more than 200 company risk assessments has revealed that many employees are clocking more than 60 hours a week, if the time spent commuting to work is taken into account. Yet many employees and employers fail to consider this time when they are looking at the average hours staff have to work. Executives at Risk Answers, which carried out the research, say the stress of work coupled with other pressures including congestion means that at-work driving risk management should be at the top of every fleet decision-maker's management agenda.
- Much of the focus of city and state lawmakers is on cell phones as a major source of distracted driving. However, there are many other emerging technologies being used in vehicles today that are potentially distracting. New models are arriving with sophisticated navigation systems and DVD players. Studies show that eating, turning on a car radio and talking with passengers are larger distractions than cell phone use, while others show that in-car use of both hand-held and hands-free cell phone causes distraction problems. Lawmakers are caught in a quandary over how to cope with these new technologies in cars. As they did when the car radio was introduced in 1930, some lawmakers are calling for the new technologies to be banned from vehicles.
- A Maryland House committee on Monday debated proposed legislation that would subject those caught using hand-held cell phones while driving to a misdemeanor charge and a fine of up to \$500. The proposed measure exempts emergency calls.
- Two bills, both restricting the use of hand-held cell phones by drivers, are under consideration in the Georgia legislature. One of the bills,

requires a \$50 fine and two points on the record of drivers who are caught using a hand-held cell phone or mobile radio. Emergency use is exempted under the bill. The second measure makes hand-held cell phone use by drivers a misdemeanor with a \$15 fine. A February 6 editorial in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution suggests that the Georgia legislature pass a bill that bans all cell phone use, hand-held or hands-free, by drivers. The editorial cites research that said there was little difference in driver distraction if the phone was a hand-held or hands-free model. In a response to the editorial, Kimberly Kuo, vice president of communications at CTIA, wrote that in two recent studies, the use of wireless phones ranked eighth on the list of distractions that caused traffic accidents and that data collected by about 20 state highway authorities at the scene of accidents confirm this research. On average, wireless phones have been found to contribute to about one-half of one percent of accidents. Common activities such as changing the radio or climate controls may be less visible, but often rank higher as dangerous distractions.

- 1 Bills have been introduced in the Texas Senate and House that would restrict drivers' use of hand-held cell phones. The House bill calls for violators to face a ticket and a fine of up to \$100. The Senate bill calls for a ticket and an unspecified fine.
- 2 Paramus, N.J. borough officials are scheduled to vote on Tuesday on a measure to restrict the use of hand-held cell phones by drivers. Violators face a summons and a fine of up to \$250. If the measure is passed, Paramus would become the fifth community in the state to restrict drivers' use of hand-held cell phones. Legislation to restrict the practice statewide has passed the New Jersey Senate and is up for debate in the Assembly.
- 3 The Wyoming House Transportation and Highways Committee voted down a proposal to restrict cell phone use by drivers. The lawmakers said that distracted driving, not specifically cell phone use, is the problem, and that the proposed legislation would not have solved it.

Restraint use among young children rose to a record level in 2002, according to estimates from a major survey conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). An estimated 99 % of infants under age one are now restrained, up 4 % from 2000. Fully 94 % of toddlers are now restrained, a 3 % gain over two years ago. The new survey indicates that 83 % of children ages four to seven are restrained. No comparable statistics are available for this age group. NHTSA Administrator, Jeffrey W. Runge, M.D., released the news during a press conference last week in Washington to promote Child Passenger Safety Week. Dr. Runge indicated his concern about other findings from the survey, which show that many young children continue to ride in the front seat. An estimated 15 percent of infants under age one now ride in a front seating position; 10 percent of toddlers ages one to three ride in the front; and 29 percent of youngsters ages four to seven do so. Restraint use estimates are based on the National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS), conducted periodically by NHTSA. The latest survey was conducted in June 2002 and its results were compared with a prior NOPUS survey conducted in the fall of 2000, which also tracked child restraint use. Visit the NHTSA website for the press release. <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/press/pressdisplay.cfm?year=2003&filename=pr03-03.html>

Discussing vehicle rollover, NHTSA Administrator, Dr. Jeffrey Runge was critical of the high risk of rollover for SUVs and other light trucks. However, he said the public must make safety decisions when making its buying choices because "We cannot regulate ourselves out of this mess." Runge also challenged carmakers to make sure that onboard Internet access and other "gizmos and gadgets" do not interfere with safety. Both manufacturers and suppliers "have a fundamental responsibility to access hazard potentials in these items." Runge acknowledged that some communication systems may enhance safety, but said that most of the devices are for "consumer convenience and appeal." Although NHTSA has a responsibility to ensure safe vehicle operation, he said the agency isn't planning to develop formal regulations for telematics. "We cannot

regulate fast enough to keep up with technological innovation, nor would we want to," Runge said. "This administration would always prefer voluntary brilliance to enforced compliance."

- An insurance industry group will soon take a closer look at SUV safety, just weeks after the top U.S. auto regulator warned car companies to build safer SUVs or face possible new regulation. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) will sponsor two days of meetings with engineers from carmakers and other researchers. They will tackle concerns with light trucks, which include SUVs, minivans and pickups, sharing the road with smaller passenger vehicles, such as compact cars. The group will focus on interior protections for drivers and passengers and on the severity of crashes between the two vehicle classes. According to government figures, there are nearly 300 deaths per 100,000 crashes involving a large pickup and another vehicle. The figure drops to 205 when a large SUV is involved and 151 for a smaller SUV.
- A Stroudsburg advertising agency and Roadway Express are part of a new national highway safety campaign that will be rolled out in Washington, D.C., this spring. "Share the Road Safely" is a U.S. DOT project aimed at promoting safety among both truckers and older drivers. The public awareness campaign is designed to reduce the number of accidents involving commercial motor vehicles and older drivers. Gallagher & Gallagher is doing market research to support the project and creating a host of materials from brochures and fact sheets to a Web site and public service announcements. Roadway's trucks and truck drivers were used as the backdrop for the national material, although names will be removed so that all audiences can relate to the campaign.
- Consumers Union testing shows that tires with half their tread have measurably poorer performance in wet driving conditions. New tires typically have about 10/32 inch of tread, but at 5/32 inch, CU found that stopping distances increased 3 to 6 feet when braking and handling on dry roads. Overall, however, CU said the improvement in dry conditions did not offset the loss of performance in wet or snowy conditions.



Depending on the tread composition, tires will typically reach half tread depth after 25,000 to 40,000 miles of service. CU concluded that a tire with tread depth of 5/32 to as low as 2/32 is acceptable only for driving in very dry regions that seldom get significant rain or snow. In most areas, however, drivers must allow extra stopping distances in wet conditions if driving on tires that have only 50% of new tread depth.

- ☞ According to a University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute (UMTRI) study published in the February issue of *American Scientist*, driving is 65 times more dangerous than flying. Prompted by the Sept. 11 terrorist attack, the authors examined flying and driving. The number of lives lost in traffic crashes in the United States was 42,119 in 2001. In comparison, commercial air travel resulted in 433 fatalities in nonstop flights in 1992-2001, including 232 on board the four hijacked flights. Worldwide, Boeing estimates that 7,071 people died in airplane crashes in 1991-2000. For flying to be as risky as driving, disastrous airline incidents on the scale of Sept. 11 would have to occur about once a month, according to UMTRI researchers. For more information, contact *American Scientist* at (919) 549-0097.
- ☞ OSHA has recently rejected a petition from IIHS to require that all employees use seat belts while driving or riding in vehicles on the job. Instead, OSHA plans to increase occupant protection in motor vehicles through educational efforts. Motor vehicle injuries are the leading cause of work-related deaths. More than 1,300 people died in on-the-job crashes in 2000. However, seat belts were not used in at least two-thirds of these crashes, according to NIOSH. IIHS is asking OSHA to reconsider its denial of the petition.
- ☞ Education alone does not increase motor vehicle safety, according to IIHS. "This shouldn't be surprising, after all, drivers believe the problem on the road is some other motorist, not themselves, so they don't think they need to heed the education," the institute said. Programs that succeed in getting drivers to change their behavior "involve more than trinkets and slogans," the institute pointed out. They involve enacting good traffic safety laws, enforcing them, and educating drivers about the

consequences of noncompliance. "Implementing such programs is the aspect of U.S. highway safety efforts that has fallen short compared with other countries," according to IIHS. For more information, visit the IIHS website at [www.highwaysafety.org](http://www.highwaysafety.org).

- FHWA researchers are striving to improve nighttime visibility for drivers. Approximately half of all motor vehicle fatalities occur at night, even though traffic volume is substantially less than during the day. A large proportion of nighttime crashes are single-vehicle, run-off-the road crashes, which suggests "that a driver's inability to recognize delineation, guidance, or warning information may be a contributing factor," according to FHWA. Additional information about FHWA's activities to improve nighttime visibility is available in the January/February issue of *Public Roads*. For more information, call the FHWA Office of Safety Research and Development at (202) 493-3371.

The U.S. Interstate system is becoming increasingly congested because travel is rapidly outpacing existing capacity, according to a new report by the Road Information Program (TRIP). The congestion is resulting in both safety and economic problems. A recent study by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) found that it would take nearly double current highway investments- \$125 billion annually- to significantly improve overall conditions of U.S. roads and bridges, including improvements in safety and reductions in congestion. For more information, visit the AASHTO website at <http://www.aashto.org/aashto/home.nsf/FrontPage>.